

House Of Rules

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HOUSE OF RULES

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FADE IN:

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - BASEMENT- NIGHT

Rain lashes the windows. Thunder rolls close—restless, impatient.

The Basement room floor is a graveyard of entertainment: **OLD VHS TAPES, WORN BOARD GAMES**, missing pieces, warped instruction manuals. Everything's been touched too many times.

A loose circle on the carpet.

JUNE CALDER leans back on her hands, already bored.
SAWYER BOONE flicks a card into the air, catches it.
RHEA SOLACE sits cross-legged, quietly lining up mismatched game pieces, and organizing
RENEE HOLLOWAY sits a little apart, knees pulled in, watching faces instead of games.

The silence gets uncomfortable.

SAWYER

(flat, unimpressed)

So what is this—round twelve, or do we finally admit we've ruined every game known to man?

June groans and kicks a VHS tape across the floor.

JUNE

I swear to God, if I have to play one more thing with missing rules, I'm gonna lose it.

Rhea offers a cautious smile.

RHEA

(picking up a vhs tape)

We could.. just put something on?
 Like...background
 noise?

Sawyer gestures to the pile with their foot.

SAWYER

We've already seen all of these.
 Twice.
 And the second time was worse.

Renee doesn't respond. Her eyes drift down the hallway—past the bathroom. She lingers there longer than she means to.

From the basement kitchen—

DAWN PRYCE appears, holding a bowl of **fresh popcorn**, steam curling up into the dim light.

DAWN

Alright, alright— I bring to you A
Chef's specialilty!

Sawyer snorts.

SAWYER

Aww Congratulations. You popped
corn.

Dawn drops into the circle anyway, holding the bowl out. Sawyer takes some. June barely notices.

JUNE

There has to be something else in
this house.

She sits up now, restless energy kicking in.

JUNE (CONT'D)

My parents never throw anything
away. Ever.
There's gotta be more stuff
somewhere.

Rhea stiffens just slightly.

RHEA

..Like where?

June's grin spreads.

JUNE

.....The storage closet.

Sawyer's smile drops.

SAWYER

Hell no!

Rhea shakes her head immediately.

RHEA

June, absolutely not. That closet
is—

JUNE
 -just a closet.

No one laughs.

Everyone looks at each other

SAWYER
 Ok well who's going to go check?

Without discussion—**NOSE GOES.**

Sawyer slaps a finger to their nose.

Rhea and Dawn follows, hesitant but quick.

Renee does it last, calm, deliberate.

June looks around—annoyed.

JUNE
 Oh come on—

She reluctantly presses her finger to her nose.

The bathroom door **CREAKS OPEN.**

KADEN FINCH steps out, drying his hands on his jeans. He stops.

All eyes turn to him.

Every finger is still pressed firmly to a nose.

Kaden exhales slowly.

KADEN
 Seriously

Sawyer flashes an apologetic smile.

SAWYER
 House rules.

Kaden drops his hands.

KADEN
 I was gone for, like, not even
 thirty seconds.

JUNE
 (smiling, innocent)
 Unlucky timing.

Kaden looks down the dark hallway toward the back of the house.

KADEN
(deep breath)
It's literally just a closet.

THE CLOSET

INT. BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

He stops in front of the **STORAGE CLOSET**.

The door is old. Scuffed. Slightly warped.

Kaden hesitates—just long enough to notice.

KADEN
(deep breaths)
Deep Breaths Kaden, Deep Breaths

He reaches out.

CREAK. The door opens.

Darkness inside. Thick. Dusty.

Kaden reaches in, pushing aside forgotten junk—old coats, broken boxes, something metallic clinking faintly.

His hand brushes - **WOOD.** Smooth. Solid. Carved.

He freezes.

Fingers curl around the object.

Whatever it is..

It doesn't feel forgotten.

THE GAME

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

OVERHEAD SHOT

The wooden object **SLAMS** onto the floor.

A **HEAVY, CARVED GAMEBOARD** crashes down among VHS tapes and half-broken board games.

A thick cloud of **DUST EXPLODES** upward.

Everyone jerks back, coughing.

SAWYER

(coughing, half-laughing)

Shit— we said *find us a game*, not
summon something from the dead!

Sawyer waves the dust away dramatically.

JUNE

How old is that thing?
Because I'm pretty sure it just
aged me like ten years.

Dawn leans forward, squinting through the haze, genuinely curious.

DAWN

What even *is* that?

He traces a finger near the carvings, stops short of touching them.

DAWN (CONT'D)

What does it say?

Renee is already moving.

She kneels, brushing dust from the carved letters with careful fingers.

RENEE

Haus der Regeln.
(HOUSE - DARE - REGAN)

She pronounces it cleanly.

The room goes quiet.

RENEE (CONT'D)

It means *House of Rules*.
It's German.

Everyone looks at her with a confused expression

SAWYER

Since when do you casually speak German?

Renee shrugs, still calm.

RENEE

(looking around)

What?

My dad's German.

Rhea hasn't moved. Her arms are wrapped around herself now.

RHEA

Something about this doesn't feel right.

(beat)

Does this feel right to y'all?

KADEN

(sarcastic)

Oh this is fantastic I always wanted to play a German game

SAWYER

You're the one who fucking grabbed it

KADEN

I'm sorry I didn't know Germans lived in June's house

DAWN

(ignoring them)

Why do you have a German game in your closet anyway?

June snorts.

JUNE

My dad has a weird obsession with buying shit from the neighbors' house, He brings home anything that looks "interesting."

KADEN

(Sarcastic)

Right...Right

The group pauses

DAWN

Well... is someone gonna open it?

Silence.

The rain rattles harder against the windows.

The group stares at the box.

No one touches it.

Renee's eyes trace the carvings—symbols etched too precisely, too intentionally.

Rhea shakes her head slightly.

RHEA

(a scared little laugh)
We don't have to play this.

Sawyer forces a laugh.

SAWYER

Yeah, because cursed German box
was *definitely* on tonight's bingo
card.

DAWN

How do you know it's cursed?

SAWYER

(a little cocky)
Just my intuition

KADEN

Curses don't exist

RENEE

Wouldn't so sure about that

June exhales, annoyed.

JUNE

Everyone's overreacting.

She reaches out.

Renee notices immediately.

RENEE

June—

Too late.

June flips the latch.

CLICK. The box opens.

Inside—

A **YELLOWED INSTRUCTION BOOKLET**, thick and brittle.

A neat stack of **ROLE CARDS**, face-down.

And carved recesses—empty, waiting.

The air feels heavier now.

The lights flicker once.

Then hold.

June grins, trying to keep things light.

JUNE

See? Just a game.

Renee doesn't smile.

Rhea swallows hard.

Kaden straightens, uneasy despite himself.

And somewhere in the house—

All **DOOR CLICKS SHUT**. No one notices.

Yet.

Dawn reaches into the box and lifts the **YELLOWED BOOKLET**.

DAWN

Well... at least the rules are in
English—

Before he can open it, **RHEA SNATCHES IT** from his hands.

RHEA

Hell no. We do NOT trust you
with **any** rules considering your
history of cheating.

She smirks, clearly enjoying this.

Dawn blinks.

DAWN

I do not cheat.....

He looks around the circle.

No one meets his eyes.

Sawyer slowly grabs more popcorn.

June stares at the floor.

Kaden presses his lips together.

Renee doesn't even try to hide it.

Dawn exhales.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Okay... Fine, I've cheated
a *couple* times. But fucking who
cares?

JUNE

(impatient)

Rhea, hurry up and read the rules.
I'm bored out of my
brain.

Rhea hesitates, thumb brushing the booklet's cracked spine.

RHEA

...Okay. Okay.

She opens it.